

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

FOCUSED DETERRENCE IN NEW ORLEANS

Focused Deterrence and the Promise of Fair and Effective Policing

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When any part of the American family does not feel like it is being treated fairly, that's a problem for all of us. . . . It's not just a problem for some. It's not just a problem for a particular community or a particular demographic. It means that we are not as strong as a country as we can be. And when applied to the criminal justice system, it means we're not as effective in fighting crime as we could be. (Remarks made by President Barack Obama when establishing the Task Force on 21st Century Policing, December 18, 2014)

The act of policing communities, especially minority communities, always involves a delicate balance (Meares and Kahan, 1998). On the one hand, research has suggested that the police benefit from the general willingness of community members to cooperate with them to report crimes, identify criminals, assist in investigations, and address conditions that might facilitate crime (Moore, 1992; Reisig, 2010; Tyler and Fagan, 2008). On the other hand, research also has suggested that effective policing invariably involves tactics that bring the police into close and regular contact with community residents. This contact can be viewed by community residents, particularly minority residents, as intrusive and unwarranted, leading citizens to doubt whether the police respect their rights or care about their well-being (Brunson and Miller, 2006; Brunson and Weitzer, 2009; Carr, Napolitano, and Keating, 2007). Despite whether individuals have personal contact with police officers, their perceptions of the legitimacy of police have important consequences for police effectiveness (Tyler, 2004, 2006). Policing is far more difficult without the support of the public. Therefore, police effectiveness is powerfully influenced by the consequences of different tactical and policy choices for their legitimacy.

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Among the members of the communities involved, police legitimacy is regarded as the appropriate role that police play in making and implementing rules governing public conduct (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Huo, 2002). Although many factors influence police legitimacy (e.g., Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012), police departments need to develop, implement, and sustain crime-control practices that are both fair and effective. As suggested by the National Research Council's Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices, "policing that is perceived as just is more effective in fostering a law-abiding society, and that success in reducing crime enhances police legitimacy" (Skogan and Frydl, 2004: 2). More recently, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) noted that, "law enforcement's obligation is not only to reduce crime but also to do so fairly while protecting the rights of citizens" (p. 42).

Focused deterrence strategies represent a relatively new crime-reduction approach that holds great promise in reducing serious violence while improving strained relationships between minority neighborhoods and the police departments that serve them (Kennedy, 2011). Focused deterrence strategies honor core deterrence ideas, such as increasing risks faced by offenders, while finding new and creative ways to deploy traditional and nontraditional law-enforcement tools to do so, such as directly communicating incentives and disincentives to targeted offenders (Kennedy, 1998, 2008). Corsaro and Engel (2015, this issue) show that the focused deterrence approach can be used to good effect in reducing serious gang violence in New Orleans, a city known for persistently high levels of violence, concentrated disadvantage, police misconduct, and political corruption. The New Orleans evaluation joins a growing body of rigorous scientific evidence that has suggested these strategies indeed generate noteworthy crime-prevention gains (Braga and Weisburd, 2012; Land, 2015, this issue).

Focused deterrence programs, such as the New Orleans Group Violence Reduction Strategy, seem to be well positioned to be regarded as fair and just crime-reduction approaches (Brunson, 2015, this issue). First, community leaders, social service providers, and others are engaged in the planning, design, and execution of these violence-prevention initiatives. Collaborative partnerships between police and community members improve the transparency of law-enforcement actions and provide residents with a much-needed voice in crime-prevention work. Second, by using analysis to identify the gangs and other criminally active groups central to violence, these programs are highly focused on very risky people rather than on subjecting uninvolved individuals to indiscriminate enforcement. Third, during "call-in" communication sessions, targeted individuals are warned of the consequences associated with continued violent behavior and advised to take advantage of the services and opportunities being offered to them. In the eyes of community members, there is an inherent fairness in offering targeted offenders a choice and in providing resources to support their transition away from violent behavior rather than simply arresting and prosecuting them.

Fourth, focused deterrence takes advantage of recent theorizing regarding procedural justice and legitimacy (Braga, 2012). Studies have suggested that when procedural justice approaches are used by the police, not only will citizens evaluate the legitimacy of the police more highly, but also they will be more likely to obey the law in the future (e.g., Paternoster, Brame, Bachman, and Sherman, 1997). Advocates of focused deterrence strategies argue that targeted offenders should be treated with respect and dignity, reflecting procedural justice principles (Kennedy, 2011). The Chicago Project Safe Neighborhoods strategy, for instance, sought to increase the likelihood that the offenders would “buy in” and voluntarily comply with the prosocial, antiviolence norms being advocated by interacting with offenders in ways that enhance procedural justice in their communication sessions (Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan, 2007).

Effective violence reduction requires proactive law-enforcement actions to address the high-risk people and high-risk places that generate the bulk of urban violent crime problems. However, there is no legitimate reason why police departments cannot be proactive while being fair and respecting the rights of citizens. The New Orleans experience described by Corsaro and Engel (2015, this issue) represents an important addition to our knowledge base on police programs and policies that seem to strike the important balance between fairness and effectiveness.

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